

TELEOS GROUP: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE INTERNET, SOCIAL
MOVEMENTS, AND TECHNOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

ARI BERENBAUM: TELEOS GROUP: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE
INTERNET, SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, AND TECHNOLOGY
(Under the direction of Judith Blau)

This paper compares the attributes of new internet technologies used for social movement. In particular, it describes the attributes of a new email technology particularly well-suited for social movement recruitment, networking, and participation.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The advent of the internet has added sophisticated technological tools to the toolkits of groups organized for social movement. Many readers will be familiar with the online activities of a non-governmental organization (NGO) such as MoveOn.org. Through its activities in online recruitment, networking, activism, media dissemination, and donations, MoveOn, initially a group of just a handful, became a legitimate and influential player in the U.S. presidential race of 2004. The technological tool to be described here improves significantly on this model.

This technological tool for social movement networking and recruitment began development in January 2004. As part of the product's original development team (néé Teleos Group), I have been playing the role of participant-observer from the very initial phases. When it became apparent that the product could be the focus of a potential academic paper, IRB approval mandated that verbal consent be provided from all members of the development team. Since the beginning of the project, I have had access to

design updates, email conferencing, telephone, and face-to-face communication.

A Functional Analogy: When I describe the technology to laypersons, a functional analogy I use is a new technology called Pandora¹. This online technology learns progressively about the user's music tastes, and as a result, provides a customized online radio station that allows the user to hear music he/she might like but would never have known about otherwise. Similarly, the technology in development by Teleos places the user into contact with sympathetic organizations (based on interests that the user chooses to share with the technology) that might help both the individual and the organization reach mutually beneficial outcomes. The technology helps to convey salient knowledge and information to the potential participant about social movement whereas before there was no distinct functional linkage.

An abbreviated chronology will provide a narrative of the technology's development and functionality:

January 2004: Technology is conceived as a graphic interface for email. All previously existing email technologies have displayed data chronologically in list

¹ <http://www.pandora.com/>

form. Technology was not originally formed as a solution for social movement organization.

December 2004: Added to the technology is its capacity for social organization as a sophisticated personal information management (PIM) tool. Existing email technologies allow for simplistic sub-grouping of user contacts (e.g. folder views). The technology as conceived allows for the user to voluntarily share data about him/herself as well as about his/her contacts; this volunteered data would be analyzed by the technology such that the user could scroll through different graphic social networks of the contacts; these views would illustrate connections between contacts that were previously unknown to the user.

February 2005: Technology is adapted to the needs of social movements. The technology, being a representation of the user's social network, could be co-opted to organize networked grassroots (as opposed to strictly hierarchical) social movement. Hierarchically-organized social movement organizations are a traditional model that can become deterritorialized via a technology like that of Teleos'.

May 2005: Conceptualization of the graphic interface's display begins.

August 2005: Complications surface regarding technology's proposed display. Production stalls.

September 2005: New functionality developed whereby users can voluntarily represent their demographics and voting choices anonymously yet globally, thereby contributing to a larger social process. This new functionality is proposed as a motivator for electronic voting and electronic representation. Social movement organizations can use these data to craft individualized appeals to users. Because Teleos can track the changes over time within the user's profile, SMOs have the ability to mine sophisticated, overlapping networks of potential participant backgrounds. These appeals can be sent via Teleos to users (i.e. no organization other than Teleos knows the email address to which the appeal will be sent; they know only the target's interests). Users are paid by the social movement organization on the basis of which appeals they view.

September 2005: Development of interface design continues but is complicated by funding issues and external commitments of the development team.

Within the above chronology, readers can pick out several key moments of development. They would be: 1) the graphic interface 2) the capacity to represent complex social networks graphically 3) the adoption of this technology for grassroots social movement 4) the opportunity for the technology to motivate electronic voting and electronic representation and 5) the generation of direct social movement organization appeals to users based on individual-level data. Because these five developments are described in abstract language, it is necessary to put the technology in context by actually describing its usage from a first-person perspective:

Upon downloading the program, the user imports his/her address book from his/her existing email program.

The user is taken through an initial voluntary electronic interview so that the social networks of the graphic interface can be built.

The technology builds the interface and the user begins to play with it so as to set his/her ideal display

parameters for usage. This interface allows for new visually-displayed pathways of communication, new connections rendered in three dimensions that make work and play potentially more productive and efficient.

The user is free to use these new networked connections to facilitate the sharing of information and the motivation for action related to social movement.

At the time of a vote at any level of federal, state, or local government, the user is asked to cast his/her vote electronically. Participation is mandatory, where users will need to cast an electronic vote (even if it is cast randomly) before they can access the email interface. Although these are not official votes, when the votes are compiled throughout the entire network of users, the user can see whether the nation, state, or locality that goes to the polls to vote is representative of electronic representation.

Based upon the volunteered demographic and voting history information of the user, social movement organizations can craft messages appealing to certain interest groups. This is a new frontier in recruitment. These organizations send their appeals to Teleos and Teleos forwards the messages on to the appropriate users. This process is mediated by Teleos so that the email address and

other personal information of the user stays protected. These appeals go to a separate folder for the user where they are listed either by date received, name of sender, demographic targeted by sender (e.g. liberal on environment, conservative on reproductive rights, etc.), or amount of dollars potentially paid to the user. The user then can browse the headers of these appeals, and if they choose to click-through, a designated credit card or bank account will be credited for the amount specified by the social movement organization. The user can then forward this appeal to anyone in their social network that they think might benefit from opening this appeal (and also receive the denomination specified by the social movement organization). In addition, the amount paid to the user for any appeal can be immediately donated back to the organization from which it came if the user feels this to be a cause worth supporting monetarily. If a user does not wish to receive appeal headers from a particular organization in the future, he/she can indicate this and Teleos will comply going forward.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies have been written attributing the spread of Enlightenment ideas in the late 18th and early 19th centuries to the then-new technologies of mass communication such as printed books, pamphlets, and letters (cf. Habermas 1962 [1989]). While the effect of the internet for social movement organizing has been investigated, no studies currently exist comparing the attributes of different electronic technologies. This may be explained by the fact that the internet is still in a stage of relative infancy, especially as it has been adopted by social movement organizations (SMOs).

Due to this dearth of literature, I will instead introduce case studies of where the internet has been used for social movement. As actual histories documenting the intersection of internet technology and social movement, these case studies illuminate the immediacy of some of the general technologies reviewed later in the comparative results section of this paper. Secondly, in this review I will introduce literature that justifies why the internet

might be amenable to these types of mobilizing technologies in the first place.

Case Study #1: Argentina 2001

The Argentine November/December 2001 financial crisis sparked social movement that was later facilitated by internet technologies (see Finquelievich 2004). On November 29, Argentines withdrew pesos from banks en masse, forcing the Rúa government in December to institute restrictions on withdrawing money from depositing accounts (this action was named "corralito"). On December 19, 2001, days after rioting and looting in Buenos Aires by leftist and unemployed groups, middle-class offline protest began in the form of "cacaerolazos"². This begat offline networking in coffee shops or on street corners. This networking, already aided by anti-government email chains, motivated online networking through electronic forums and online chats. Neighborhood committees (of which there were more than fifty) communicated to one another via e-mail and websites, resulting in bi-monthly interneighborhood meetings where issues and proposals were debated online in

² Slang for citizen's protest, in the form of rattling ing pots and pans, from windows or doorways, or through street marches.

advance. Results of the meetings were communicated via website and electronic newsletter. Websites such as Cacerolazo.com updated their content daily with news of social protest. Low-income citizens gained access to the electronic protest network via one of the then 1,300 community technology centers (CTCs).

Case Study #2: The Zapatistas

The Zapatistas (EZLN), representing the grievances of poor indigenous persons of the southern Mexico state of Chiapas, have been aided by the use of the internet by (I)NGOs concerned with social justice. Although the Zapatistas themselves did not have internet access in 1994, existing electronic networks such as LaNeta were able to disseminate communication that had been smuggled across military lines (Cleaver 1998). LaNeta is a network with ties to the Institute for Global Communication (IGC), a San Francisco-based NGO. As the Zapatista movement has drawn traction and longevity, it has been able to gain support via electronic communication from (I)NGOs supporting indigenous groups, environmentalism, and women's rights. By disseminating grievances in this networked way, the Zapatistas have deterritorialized the conflict, allowing

the fight to be fought effectively at international justice and legitimacy level, rather than as simply a domestic rights dispute.

Case Study #3: Amnesty International

Amnesty International has created an in-house technology called the Urgent Action Network. This technology allows victims of human rights abuses to contact Amnesty International; their message is then forwarded to Amnesty International networks in over 70 countries; when the alert finally reaches the individual level, network members compose letters, emails, telegrams, or faxes to the official(s) who may be able to stop or curtail these abuses. This way, Amnesty can leverage all of its members' sympathies to the aid of any one person in suffering. The local becomes the global, and then the amassed grievance returns to the local level. Distributed access allows messages to filter through the system extremely quickly, on a level that was not thinkable pre-Internet.

Networks

The new communication system radically transforms space and time, the fundamental dimensions of human life. Localities become disembodied

from their cultural, historical, geographic meaning, and reintegrated into functional networks, or into image collages, inducing a space of flows that substitutes for the space of places. Time is erased in the new communication system when past, present, and future can be programmed to interact with each other in the same message. The space of flows and timeless time are the material foundations of a new culture, that transcends and includes the diversity of historically transmitted systems of representation: the culture of real virtuality where make-believe is belief in the making. (Castells 1996: 357)

Networks constitute the new social morphology of our societies, and the diffusion of networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power, and culture. While the networking form of social organization has existed in other times and spaces, the information technology paradigm provides the material basis for its pervasive expansion through the entire social structure. (Castells 1996:469)

If we take the networked, non-geographically-based information society that Castells elegantly proposes here as an empirical given in 2005, studying its use vis-à-vis social movements means finding order and paths of least resistance within this new structure. Scientists working on this problem have developed several theories of internet technology's purported structure and function. First of all, are these new networks creating ties or removing the individual from society at large? In response to Robert Putnam's (2000) theories of "bowling alone," or Smith's (1999) research about the decline of socialization with neighbors, Wellman and Hampton optimistically see a new "networked society" where "boundaries are more permeable, interactions are with diverse others, linkages switch between multiple networks, and hierarchies (when they exist) are flatter and more recursive." (Wellman and

Hampton 1999:1) Although Uslaner (2000) has concluded that the internet neither creates nor inhibits social relations and trust, Wellman and Hampton (1999) specify that this new networked society is especially beneficial in maintaining weak ties, i.e. "persons and groups with whom one does not have strong relationships of work, kinship, sociability, support, or informational exchange." (Wellman and Hampton 1999:1) Wellman (2001) calls these weak communities "personal communities". These ties may be weak but they are highly specialized in their form and functionality (Wellman and Gulia 1999).

The advent of the internet allows organizations to reach tied network structures where more traditional media forms have not. The internet induces the personalization of what had been considered "mass media": the internet is "the first medium that combines all the powers to reach a large audience that you can see in broadcasting and newspapers with all the intimacy and multi-directional flow of information that you see in telephone calls. It is both intimate and powerful." (Godwin 1997) In addition, Walther (1996) indicates that managing relationships through the internet allows for interaction to be "hyperpersonal" in a way that subverts and supercedes the norms of traditional communication. But as yet, online media and networking has

failed to eclipse the power of traditional media as a means to support more private and localized forms of community (Mukerji and Simon 1998). That does not invalidate the possibility that "computers could support the growth of communities, helping them get things done and build a sense of common purpose and identity". (Mukerji and Simon 1998: 260) The Pew Institute's Internet and American Life Project (2000) concluded that use of email enhanced social life with family, friends, and extended overall contact. More importantly, even if there are fundamental differences between internet community members, a "critical commonality" can forge the way for "receptivity, interest, and disclosure, despite that they are strangers" (Turner et al. 2001:234).

Existing Studies on Internet Networking for Social Movement and Advocacy

Existing studies on internet networking have largely dealt with social movements constrained to a specific geographic region and therefore sharing both locale and cognitive frame. For instance: the Zapatistas (Castells 1997), the Falun Gong (O'Leary 2000), Echo, a New York-based virtual salon (Horn 1998), or the San Francisco-based

WELL (Whole Earth Lectronic Link) (Rheingold 1993).

Influential social movements have rooted their claims in a local context or conflict but have aimed at a global audience to garner legitimacy (Cohen and Rai 2000; Keck and Sikkink 1998). Luckily, geographical proximity is no longer the sole determinant in patterning social relationships, as it may have been in generations past before the "internet revolution". On average, Americans know about twelve neighbors, but only one of the twelve represents a strong tie (Wellman and Gulia 1999). Thus, the potential participants are out there, but they are not communicating in sophisticated networks to achieve social goals.

Non-geographically-based social movements have been researched, but their investigators have found little in the way of networked, grassroots organizing; instead, they have found flat hierarchical structures that emphasize dyad-only ties to an internet website (Earl and Schussman 2003). Studies (Kopomaa 2000; Nafus and Tracey 2000) have indicated that more successful organizing may revolve around individual-centered "communities of choice," where greater autonomy and range of action on the part of the user results in agency-validating decisions about the time, place, and partners engaged in interaction. These atomized

individual choices can cohere into larger, longer-term social processes within the movement.

Identity

Will an internet user's existing identity be amenable to a social movement conducted through grassroots networks on the internet? The reason to believe that grassroots, highly networked, internet organizing is possible is that an individual's highly networked offline identity and behavior can be systematically transferred online. The underlying assumption must be that online relations complement and are not mutually exclusive of offline relations (Viroche and Marx 1997; Wellman 2001; Wellman and Gulia 1999).

Although some researchers have seen the internet as fragmenting the user's identity into constitutive or even fantasized parts (Stone 1996; Turkle 1995), their methodology has not stood up to critique (cf. Wynn and Katz 1998). Additionally, the myth that a user's identity is essentially anonymous has also been debunked (Katz and Rice 2002).

If there is an overall summation to the new internet user's identity, it is one representative of the

quintessential symbolic trader (Castells 1996-8; Drucker 1993; Reich 1991), the trader whose tongues of language are entirely in forms that are non-oral, who directs capital with mouse clicks, and experiences efficiencies and productivity gains that were hitherto thought impossible. The question remains whether that identity that has learned to converse rapidly in bi-directional emails will be willing to see their networks of human relationships manifested and represented by the proposed technology.

CHAPTER 3

COMPARISON TO EXISTING TECHNOLOGIES (RESULTS)

In order to comprehend and illustrate the potential contribution of the technology to social movement, it is necessary to compare its functionality to existing internet social movement technologies. A summary of the findings can be found in Table 1.

Vs. Website

A website is an information locus. It is typically maintained by a closed set of people. There are some websites that post contributions from an open set of users but even in these cases, the contributions are typically maintained/censored by an editor or webmaster. Websites that are entirely open to contributions take form in bulletin boards, discussion boards or usenet (see below). The proposed technology, however, benefits from its openness. Not only are users utilizing their social contact network with greater potential productivity and efficiency (thereby opening the possibility for grassroots

movement rather than strictly hierarchical movement), but the social movement organizations that are vying for the attentions of the users exist as a open set. The personalities of any SMO can craft and contribute an appeal, and as such, players can enter and exit the competitive market at will.

Websites are only as good as the content they contain. Because the content of a website is written by a closed set of people, it is possible that a website once known for "good" content can become over time "mediocre" or even "poor". An advantage of the proposed technology is that social movement organizations are competing for the attentions of the user. This creates increased capacity for choice on the part of the user. Rather than the user choosing voluntarily to browse X social movement organization website on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis, appeals from those organizations (including new ones that the user may not be familiar with) are sorted in a global folder for the user. Then the user has the choice to click through. This results in more informed decisions about what content he/she wishes to view. It is necessary to read this series of choices within a development of tying the individual to the social movement, paving the way for more significant and globally integrated actions.

Additionally, this allows social movement organizations the capacity to remind users that there is updated content on the website. This also allows social movement organizations to gain more specific data on who their most active constituents are. For example, if the user failed to click through on any of the last four messages sent by X social movement organization, perhaps the SMO would be prudent to save a more broad (perhaps annual or semi-annual) appeal for that user. This way, the user is seeing only the appeals that he/she would most likely be interested in. This is in contrast to the current state of internet advertising, where companies like Google have learned how to match search terms and websites with advertisements for goods and services; this type of specificity helping to link users with products and services is really marginal relative to the proposed technology's access and strategic use of the interests of its users.

The advertising that currently exists on many websites can be considered invasive in the same way that any other media advertising can be considered invasive. The proposed technology ameliorates this. Appeals are sent to a separate folder (unlike spam) to be opened at the discretion of the user. The user has the ability to stop

permanently all future appeals from any given SMO. The appeals appear to the user as one-line headers indicating the sender, the subject line, the date, the amount of proposed remuneration for clicking-through, and the interests (e.g. liberal environmentalist) that the SMO is targeting. This makes the process of negotiating appeals all the more active (rather than invasive) on the part of the user.

Information without advertising does exist on the web. Users can opt for RSS news feeds and other information-only sources. But even in some of these cases, advertising tags and pop-ups may accompany the feed. Moreover, given that the bulk of new information received by the user is happening through websites, this point regarding the invasiveness of advertising remains valid.

The theoretical question at work for social movement organizations regarding websites is: *before motivating anyone to do anything, how do I get the most people to view the important content I just wrote on my website?* Secondly, *how do I get the right people (i.e. the people most likely to be recruited) to view the important content on my website?* The speedy dispersal of information is cornerstone of the Internet's attractiveness as a tool for social movement. If there is a "wrong" being perpetrated

in the world, it should be (ideally) quickly and electronically documented by text, graphic, audio, or video (or all of the above) and then distributed speedily to the global constituency that would be most likely to take action on that injustice. Whether the structures exist to administer justice is unknown, but by using the proposed technology, it is clear that users will be paired much more efficiently with electronic content than if they had to search for this content on their own. Moreover, it is not necessary for the user to search for content about social movement - the proposed technology allows the social movement organizations to come to them. In this competitive electronic market, SMOs will be quickly separated by the quality of their content and the amount of remuneration they provide to users. The capacity for word-of-mouth is still present given the link between email capability and the appeals themselves (i.e. the user can forward certain appeals to certain contacts or groups within their social network); the difference is that the focus of those appeals will be to those users that would be most likely to read and act on them.

Vs. Blog

The weblog or blog shares likenesses with websites in that it is an information locus written by a closed set of people (typically by one person or a small group). It differs from the traditional website in that its entries are listed in a chronological format (as in a online diary). The advantage of the blog as information tool for social movement is its capacity for personality. Unlike a news organization website, the blog typically has a very personal, authentic, autobiographical feel. The blog is a great opportunity for social movement participants and aspirants to post personal narratives, insider information and analysis, and personally chosen links to outside information (e.g. other websites or downloads).

The blog's greatest strength, personality, is also its greatest weakness. No only do blogged voices have the potential to become less vibrant and immediate over time, but the very nature of personality is also a limiting factor in its initial acceptance by readers. Readers that would otherwise be interested in the blog's content may be turned off by the blogger's tone, voice, style, diction, formality (or lack thereof), etc. As a result, the readers of blogs can be even more demographically homogenous than the readers of a given website, magazine, or news service. This allows for a high concentration of similar views to be

posted and read via any given blog. This type of insulation is less likely given the functionality of the proposed technology. Insulation from diverse content narrows the views of the reader rather than expanding or challenging them. As stated earlier, the proposed technology will allow many SMOs of different political, social, economic, and philosophical viewpoints to engage the same specialized demographic or a cross-section of different demographics. Recruits that might be lost due to the relative lack of personality of an email appeal written from a third person point of view (as opposed to the blog's first person perspective) may be gained via the greater proportion of the population that is receiving the specific appeal.

Both websites and blogs have great potential for developing the activist identity of the social movement recruit. The proposed technology, by contrast, simply puts the appeal into the hands of a well-targeted recruit. But the technology has some improved capability for consciousness-raising. The social networking maps that the technology builds allows the user to direct appeals, information, downloads, etc. to his/her contacts that are most likely to act positively on them. The personalities, backgrounds, and networks of trust and communication within

any network are what will "sell" a given forwarded piece of information, including an appeal. This allows for the comparison of the personality of the website or blog to the personality of the user within a given social contact network. The ideal image for use would be a tightly-knit contact group sharing "good" content in a way that gives the content the personality, authenticity, and autobiographical feel that is automatically assumed or immediately made relevant when reading a blog.

As information loci, both blogs and traditional websites do not have any of the networking functionality that exists within the proposed technology. Some blogs and websites allow readers to email a text selection to a contact, but there is typically no online networking capability. The proposed technology's integration of email and social movement information allows for grassroots networking and movement to occur electronically. Meeting new contacts may occur in non-electronic environments, but the "heavy lifting" of logistical planning and information-trading will occur between contacts online. For this reason, a tool that merges social movement information and communication between participants has decided advantages over a solitary reader anonymously engaging a website or blog.

Vs. Listserv

A listserv can communicate via email to many people at the same time. Social movement organizations use listservs to keep their participants updated on events and happenings and also to send pertinent news and information. A listserv replaces the need for the user to check the SMO website on a regular basis. Instead of going to the website, the website comes to them. In this way, the listserv shares a characteristic with the proposed technology.

A listserv often exists as an open set (i.e. anyone that subscribes to the listserv can typically contribute). This brings up the problem of anonymity. If there are 2,000 people subscribed to a listserv, it is highly likely that the subscriber will be receiving personalized email messages from people he/she doesn't know. He/she may agree with the message; he/she may disagree with the message; he/she may feel that the message is a waste of time; he/she may forward that message on. Because the listserv exists both as an open set and also allows for contributors to "hide" behind the veil of relative anonymity, listserv subscribers cannot discriminate between messages that they

want to receive and those they do not. For the user of the proposed technology, if the user does not want to see another message from a particular SMO, they can do that. For the listserv subscriber, if he/she wants to remain on the listserv, he/she is forced to view (at least the header of) every email that is sent to that listserv. While subscribers might be initially excited to receive emails from a given listserv, over time, with enough quickly deleted emails, the listserv can become burdensome on the subscriber. If the subscriber is receiving so many bits of information, eventually the subscriber could lose a sense of discrimination; which emails do you read? Which do you forward? Which do you delete? Which are events that you should attend when there appears to be so many? This can be the case even when listserv managers bundle the day's most important messages or threads into an aggregating digest that is then sent to listserv subscribers once a day. These digests are not universal and may or may not significantly ameliorate the "data overload". Also, listservs can be attacked by spammers such that if a subscriber is on a particular listserv, every piece of spam directed at that listserv is copied on to the subscriber. In the case of the proposed technology, because all

messages from SMOs are mediated by Teleos, there is no opportunity for spam to be directed on to users.

Communication via the proposed technology is likely to be more personable than that of a listserv due to the lack of anonymity. Although a user's contact list could be large, the assumption is that grouped email messages related to the user's grassroots social network will have greater salience than a listserv message generated by an anonymous subscriber. The key is that the bonds that tie together a contact list or several contact lists will create greater immediacy and potential for action than a broad email message. Globally inclusive email conversations can still exist via the proposed technology, but the receiving set will be closed and known to the user rather than open and anonymous. Small, specialized listservs directed to specific communities can also be effective in trading information and motivating action; the proposed technology also allows for this possibility. The psychological hurdles to social networking via a large listserv may be more manageable via the proposed technology. A contact that is the periphery of the user's social network may be more likely to respond to a networking-related email than an anonymous or bulked pitch via a listserv. Thus, while the listserv benefits from the

possibility for its size, the proposed technology's specificity and small scope may prove to be equally useful or even potentially superior. Additionally, SMOs that direct their appeals through the proposed technology have the ability to target specific niches. While most listservs also represent relatively distinct groups, that is not necessarily the case. When getting a message out to potential participants, the proposed technology may allow SMOs to refine their appeals more than simply blanketing a variety of like-minded listservs.

Lastly, regardless of the quality of listserv messages, listservs tend to have a problem regarding the sheer volume of electronic data they can produce. Large listservs generate many messages. Active listservs generate many messages. Listservs with spam problems generate many messages. Thus, regardless of quality (or lack thereof), quantity as regards listservs can be a significant drawback. The proposed technology, on the other hand, allows users to sort all messages from SMOs, so while the user is getting fewer and more high-quality appeals due to a higher degree of specificity, they can also sort all those appeals and simply trash ones in bulk that are not offering enough monetary remuneration, or any other characteristic of the incoming appeals. Again,

appeals from organizations they do not like can be expurgated permanently. These attributes should cut down on email volume.

Vs. Meetup

Meetup is shorthand for any group organized on the internet that also has face-to-face contact. This shorthand was adopted from meetup.com, where individuals can join groups (e.g. Chihuahua Owner Meetup, Democracy For America Meetup) that organize meetings or events in a given physical locale.

Meetups allow for like-minded people not only to trade information and precipitate action electronically, but also to participate in an off-line interaction.

I would not like to investigate the effectiveness of on-line versus off-line activism. Instead, substantive differences in the *functionality* of each technology should be brought forth (as I have been doing thus far).

The greatest difference between meetups and the proposed technology is: meetups allow participants to interact in close physical proximity. This allows for the possibility of different types of interaction when compared with online communication. For example: *How does X*

participant relate to Y off-line? Was there a hidden context to their listserv discussion? X participant can write online really well but he/she stammers and is totally too _____ to be the leader of this dynamic group. And so forth. There exists the possibility for bonds that exist online to either be solidified/expanded or to be rendered inopportune or pointless offline. The assumption that a participant's online personality would be a good indicator/representation of off-line personality is not necessarily true in all cases. Online behavior and networking can lead to possibly uncharacteristic off-line behavior. Within the proposed technology, there is the opportunity for sub-groups to gather as a mini-coalition, but these sub-groups do not necessarily make up communities of potential action in the same way that the meetup technology implies. Meetups allow for persons unknown to one another to gather, whereas the proposed technology assumes that all contacts must fit in somewhere "known" in the user's social network.

Does physical proximity necessarily imply more personable interactions? To formulate an answer to that question, one must be willing to make assertions regarding personality and psychological orientation (assertions that do not fall within the scope of this paper). Under certain

conditions, given certain personalities, one could make the argument for physical proximity opening up channels of discourse. On the other hand, the relative distance accompanying email, instant messaging, or any other type of electronic communication may allow for more psycho-social space into which the users can place themselves. Online space is elective. It is possible that information could be felt to be revealed electronically that in person would appear inappropriate for any given reason. Therefore, to preference one form of communication over the other for its ability to create social bonds would be inappropriate.

One decided advantage of the proposed technology as compared to meetup technology is its capacity for privacy. Emails sent within the group are private. Personal information is private. Voting history data is private. The appeals that the user chooses to view are private. The meetup group on the other hand, can display its members' identities online. Those identities are linked with the preferences of the group that the member chooses to identify with. Some potential participants might identify with a movement privately without wanting to make that identification public knowledge (they may feel that their person is reduced to that identification through a public display). In this way, private signification through the

proposed technology has an advantage. Also, even if the meetup user uses an online pseudonym or does not (have to) identify himself/herself to be part of the meetup, meetup participation is performed with the implicit goal of meeting in physical space, thereby trading some kind of identity information. In states where political freedoms are limited by government intrusion and internet/physical surveillance is present, this type of signifying (i.e. meetups) loses attractiveness. Whether or not physical demonstration is needed to achieve movement goals, physical presence by participants necessarily compromises their security and privacy. Electronic communication, however, allows for greater privacy assuming the organization's servers that route emails (e.g. Teleos') are not open to surveillance. Where any registered (I)NGO or 501(c)3 produces documentation relevant to their organization that could be analyzed by the government, online electronic communication among known sub-groups (e.g. the case of the proposed technology) would not necessarily generate this type of paper trail. Low-level, grassroots-oriented groups that are coordinating their efforts through legitimate means may appear more appealing to a citizen when compared to joining an online list that could be subpoenaed by the government or joining in a protest march that could turn

violent or result in the citizen's arrest. There may be issues of personality or psychological orientation when determining those individuals likely to turn up for physical activism (versus electronic activism).

Regardless of a citizen's personal disposition towards representing their views physically (through an off-line protest), they may in fact not be in a position to represent (physically) the views that they espouse electronically: 1) Online communication can be less time-intensive than off-line. On the agenda of a given physical meeting, there might be several/many items where a given attendee might have little or nothing to add. Long organizational/strategic meetings that are dominated by a few personalities are streamlined via internet communication. Useless brokering or petty arguments by the few do not become the time-wasting bane (relatively speaking) of all participants when the discussion is moved online. What might be lost in the (lack of) personality in electronic communication has the potential to be regained from time efficiency 2) Online communication can require less energy or funds of the individual. For people with little spare time, online activism can be a real boon. Additionally, an individual may not want to risk the cost of traveling and then meeting a group of unknown people.

Using a rational choice outlook, potential participants want to keep their marginal costs of activism low but their returns high. Online activism is a way to pick and choose moments of high potential return without investing the time and energy that typically occur when making new bonds from scratch via a physical meeting of hitherto anonymous personalities. 3) For individuals that are not in (reasonably) close geographic proximity to physical meetings/demonstrations, electronic communication and dissent can exist as the only alternative. What is the benefit of a meetup of 3-6 people in a small town when those people plus 100 more can coordinate their actions via the internet? Also, transportation costs have been on a 2-year rise due to increases in the price of oil. Should fuel costs continue to inflate, geographic distances to physical social movement events will become an even a greater determinant in who travels and who stays online to protest. Technologies enabling video conferencing, online (conference) telephony, and more capacity for digital sound and video would ease a transition to more online networking/activism. 4) A potential recruit might agree with the views of the meetup group but not want to be seen there by community members for issues of politics, class, religion, education, etc. Internet activism gives

individuals the space to express their views securely and privately if they so desire. This is why the possibility exists for such greater numbers to participate in electronically-mediated social movements when compared with physical participation 5) Lastly, budding movement leaders might feel more open to voicing their concerns online than off-line (in a large physical group). Leaders that cannot dominate a physical space may be able to mobilize an electronic one. Boundaries may be felt to be more open and free-flowing in online space with greater opportunities for structural change in the group's dynamics. This may allow (but not necessarily so) for more effective leaders to come to the fore.

The worry on the part of social movements related to the rise of computer-based network technologies is that something "human" will be lost in the shift from offline to online. Even if a meetup group consists of 3-6 people, perhaps there is something gained in a small group that cannot be replicated online. The underlying assumption is that humans are inherently social creatures, and that online sociality is not a sufficient replacement for person-to-person contact. Is there a certain emotional satisfaction that occurs offline that does not exist in online contact? Additionally, procedures of deliberation

will be markedly different online versus off. Perhaps it is the offline process of talk, argument, and real-time deliberation that builds the consensus necessary for effective social movement. While online social movement can be caricatured as totally atomized participation, the points illustrated in the preceding paragraphs indicate that networking *is* possible via the internet, even if the nature of developing connections might differ from the possibilities of "real-life" interaction.

Low-level, low-intensity electronic activism is proposed as the solution not only to concerns of privacy, increased surveillance, and issues of time, energy, and geography, but also as a new possible means to subvert the stasis of institutionalized SMOs that are not generating dissent or results at a favorable rate. Speedy communication among tightly-knit groups may precipitate the ideas and voices that may be felt to be lacking among institutionalized SMOs. Eventually, the question arises as to how to coordinate the voting power of millions of individuals, whether one is focusing on traditional SMOs or new social movement networking technologies. The more that I think about this problem, the less persuaded I am that the physical protests of the future will have significant effects relative to the networking power of the electronic.

It is true that necessary things have to happen physically for a SMO to be successful (e.g. there eventually needs to be a (physical) face for the electronic movement (that can show up at debates, become a leader, and give speeches)). But if any movement is to recruit the maximum number of potential participants, this seems more likely to be done through electronic, rather than physical means. The inherent non-invasiveness of the internet (i.e. you don't need to leave the comfort of your home to participate meaningfully) will come to fore when individuals can represent their views en masse via the internet and internet voting. Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt (2004) have repeated that the entrenched interests of today's business and state empires can be upended via a networked global democracy (i.e. "the multitudes"). It is possible that via the internet we are viewing the birth of a new global social structure.

This new social structure may in fact bypass traditional state governmental structures. Currently, SMOs ultimately need to work within state channels in order to affect change. What if, in the future, online representation was so accurate that a democratic state would have to comply with online representation/views if politicians were to be re-elected? The proposed technology

opens up this possibility - an extra-national state of the internet that is representative of a nation's views and would need to be obeyed by politicians. Politicians that choose not to vote in line with their electronically-voting constituents would be quickly replaced by politicians who would. This extra-state entity would effectively shadow the voices of the politicians; where shadow and reality become disenfranchised from one another (as some would argue is currently the case), online representation would allow for this discrepancy to be objectified in black and white. There would be no doubts if a given politician was not acting the interests of his/her constituents - the online voting records of those constituents would speak for themselves. In this way, traditional physical space for the politics becomes obviated by electronic space.

This change to the democratic process may have a downside. As Tocqueville in his *Democracy in America* states, the presence of open and representative democracy may allow for what he calls a "mild despotism" of the people. Essentially, the volatile "mob desires" of the people might overwhelm any capacity of represented officials to plan strategically for the long-term. This question of "mass rule" is a legitimate concern for any democratic structure, and especially for the case of online

representation where attitudes and votes could be cast quickly and whimsically. There is no telling at this point whether online voting will result in this type of behavior, but given the voting structure that currently exists in the U.S., it may be this type of voting that would “rock the boat” enough for longstanding entrenched interests to listen to the concerns of the underrepresented (e.g. the poor, the youth, minorities, etc.).

Vs. Online Donations/Positive Consumerism

Most SMOs with an online presence give potential participants the opportunity to donate money online via credit card. These funds are used to help SMOs reach their goals. Given a large enough donation, some donations may result in a tax break for the donor.

Positive consumerism refers to online donations that assist the SMO, but also return a “gift”, good or service back to the donor. Aside from the traditional coffee mug or t-shirt, a SMO such as Working Assets³ allows positive consumption through the distribution of long distance phone service, wireless phone service, business phone service, credit cards, and organic flowers, where a portion of

³ <http://www.workingassets.com/>

profits is donated directly to non-profits. Working Assets has donated \$47 million to non-profits since 1985 (Working Assets website).

Because the proposed technology does not support any one SMO, there is no opportunity for the user to donate sums directly to the SMO via the technology. The user would have to choose to view an appeal from an SMO that asked for a donation, and then act on that appeal by going to the website and donating or choosing to defer the payment from the SMO for viewing the appeal by sending those funds back to the SMO. The proposed technology does not need to ask for donations from the user for use of the technology because SMOs that are using the technology pay a small fee to Teleos (similar to internet advertising) for every appeal that is viewed.

The proposed technology has distinct advantages over traditional online donations. SMOs that ask for direct donations can be invasive in their methods. Once they have an email address, physical address, or phone number, SMOs can use their resources to contact potential donors, sometimes repeatedly. This compromises the privacy and space of the potential donor. The proposed technology does not send any personal contact information to SMOs. Moreover, if the user would like to donate anonymously,

they can return the fee (thereby recycling the fee) to the SMO. This opens up the possibility for mediated, anonymous donations through a non-invasive 3rd-party (e.g. Teleos). Users who choose to donate can be pitched different/augmented appeals by different SMOs on the basis that they are a proven donor (i.e. this will be built into their profile). Lastly, as stated before, appeals that the user does not want to view from a given SMO do not need to be viewed, or even received ever again if the user so wishes. Appeals for donations that the user feels to be worthwhile can be forwarded through the linkages of their social network.

Not only can SMOs cut down on the invasiveness of traditional SMO capital development methods via the proposed technology, but this would also cut down on the number of (invasive) advertisements viewed by the user on the SMO websites. If information is going through an email medium, users are being paid to look at advertisements/appeals calling for either direct donation or positive consumerism. On a website, users are forced to look at those advertisements/appeals even if all they want is the website content.

As SMOs reach more of their target population via the proposed technology, this may actually increase the amount

of funds coming in even though they are paying for potential donors to view appeals. Rather than relying on email lists or word-of-mouth, specialized emailing of interest groups may provide a better response rate. Donors that would not ordinarily donate to a given SMO may feel more inclined to donate back the small appeal-viewing fee paid to them, thereby creating a new tie to the organization.

Vs. Electronic Demonstration of Grievances

Via different forms of internet technologies, individuals have the opportunity to demonstrate grievances electronically. These forms include: 1) electronic sit-ins and 2) email petitions.

Electronic sit-ins occur when coordinated groups of people continuously re-load the web page of an organization that they are demonstrating against for a pre-set amount of time. The page re-loading process can be augmented via simple programming that will automatically re-load the page continuously in the demonstrator's browser during that time. This data overload tends to disrupt the servers of the targeted organization, or at the very least get the attention of that organization. Electronic sit-ins are

different from "hacktivism", where individuals hack into data networks of organizations they are protesting and cause illegal disruptions so as to demonstrate their grievances. Unlike hacktivism, electronic sit-ins (i.e. the repeated viewing of a given web page) are perfectly legal.

Secondly, many SMOs with an online presence coordinate actions via email petitions. Typically, the SMO creates an email template whereby the demonstrator can fill in the appropriate fields with their personal information (e.g. name, email address, city and state), read the text generated by the SMO for that particular email grievance (the body of the email), and also type (if they desire) a personalized message at the end. That email is then sent to the targeted person or organization.

Again, I am not interested in the reported effectiveness of these electronic technologies as compared to one another. Instead, by highlighting differences in functionality, implications of usage will become apparent and salient.

Perhaps the greatest difference between the proposed technology and online demonstrations/petitions is that the proposed technology does not include any mechanism for direct demonstration (as is the case for online sit-ins and

petitions). Online demonstrations are necessarily low-intensity. They are on the other end of the demonstration spectrum from a physical protest march where human interactions can either validate or challenge the protestor's views. On-line, there is no direct or immediate validation. Perhaps the only immediate result of an electronic sit-in would be to re-load the organization's page until their servers crashed. I am not sure if the validation one might receive from that action could be compared to a successful march or physical petition drive. Online petitioning can be equally low-intensity; it only takes perhaps a minute to fill out one of the online petition forms and send it off. There is nothing to touch save your mouse and keyboard and the petitioner may only get a "Thank You" page after completing the petition. Some SMOs testify to the results that their online petition drives have garnered, but it is unknown if the petitions were only successful in conjunction with more traditional means. There is a lack of scientific literature on the effectiveness of these petition drives. Regardless, it is possible that some large SMOs call their listserv members to complete so many petition templates that eventually, attachment to either the cause(s) or the SMO itself might flag on the part of participants. In the same way that

listservs have the potential to resemble spam to the subscriber, numerous calls to complete online petitions can be equally numbing to the potential participant. From the participant's perspective, an argument could be made that their petition exists only as spam to the targeted person/organization (and therefore quickly and efficiently deleted). Thus, it is a chained linkage of spam starting with the SMO, moving to the participants, and then to the targeted person/organization. This is only one possible configuration of communication that could cause online petitions to be viewed more negatively than traditional actions by the potential participant. Part of the attractiveness of physical protest is its capacity to cause disruptions for the targeted person/organization. If emailed petitions can be quickly counted and then deleted, the possibility for disruption is very low. In the case of electronic sit-ins, servers now have the capacity to handle many more orders of page hits than when the internet was in its infancy. While it is still possible to crash an organization's website, it would take several orders more demonstrators to do so. The distributed nature of the internet is such that it allows for the possibility of great privacy and comfort of communication, but it is this very "out of sight, out of mind" advantage that is in fact

a disadvantage when evaluating direct electronic demonstrations of grievances.

Online petitioning in particular differs from the proposed technology in its capacity for privacy. Many potential participants might be hesitant to send their personal information directly to the person or organization against whom/which they are protesting their grievances. It might be preferable to network and act unknown to the targeted person/organization. As part of a mass or multitude, the user is able to leverage his/her passions without compromising his/her privacy. In a less than benevolent world, it seems possible that the petitioner's personal information could be used for spamming purposes or for identity fraud. Using the proposed technology, the user is able to network, trade information, and make their views known (via their voting record, etc.) without ever feeling like their identifications, significations, or representations could be used against them.

While the proposed technology does not give users a direct means to enact protest, its networking capacity may allow the "right" people (i.e. those with a worldview sympathetic to the SMO's goals) to find each other to form effective networks of social movement participants. Competitive appeals from the SMOs may allow these

grassroots networks to mobilize for events that maximize the effective usage of their skills and interests. This dynamic networking capacity of the proposed technology does not exist when completing an email petition template or anonymously re-loading a website during an electronic sit-in.

Another difference in functionality is that the groups that call for electronic petitions or sit-ins exist as a closed set, meaning that they determine the timing and structure of the demonstration largely independent of their potential demonstrators. The networks of the proposed technology exist as an open set where anyone in the network can communicate, join, or feel open to direct the discourse or possible action.

Lastly, although it cannot be considered direct protest, the proposed technology's capacity for online voting can be interpreted as an individual's desire for voicing their views; although that voice is not directly identified to the targeted person/organization, there is some means for global representation and global community. The internet allows for space in which silent majority can exist. This silent majority would be hesitant to complete an online petition or show up for a physical protest. If they can signify their views anonymously to a large network

of sympathizers, this may allow that silent majority to effectively stand up and be counted from the privacy of their homes and offices.

Vs. Action Forum

SMOs are not currently using sophisticated voting technologies to precipitate either action or participant recruitment. Secure internet voting technology, however, does exist. Companies such as BallotBox and Evote.ca allow companies and organizations to securely conduct internal elections. A pilot program allowing for limited internet voting in Switzerland was successfully implemented in 2004. If the implementation of electronic touchscreen voting in the U.S. in 2004 is any indication, internet voting for governmental offices may soon be on its way. By way of analogy, if the financial transactions that occur via electronic networks every day can safely and securely move billions upon billions of dollars, secure internet voting should appear as a theoretical possibility, if not an inevitability. As another example, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO's) "E-Governance Capacity Building" program is dedicated to evaluation and implementation of electronic

governance tools and representation around the globe⁴. Most immediately, this program has been helping to expand e-governance on the municipal level in Latin America. SMOs that can foresee this shift to electronic representation may benefit from a technological implementation prior to its widespread adoption. The only electronic voting that occurs currently via an existing SMO is Moveon.org's (Moveon's) "Action Forum".

Moveon's Action Forum is a chronological list of position statements made by some of Moveon's members. The member writes a statement that is published to the Action Forum website. Then, other members can click whether they "Agree" or "Disagree" with the statement. They can also vote on the statement's importance, ranging from one to five stars. The comments displayed on the initial page both contain the most recent posts as well as those that have received the most stars for importance. The prompt for these statements is, "What is the most important goal for MoveOn.org Political Action to pursue in the next four years?" There is then a statement that says, "This forum helps us set our agenda at MoveOn.org Political Action."

⁴ The five goals of UNESCO's e-governance program are "1) Improve the internal organisational processes of governments 2) Provide better information and service delivery 3) Increase government transparency in order to reduce corruption 4) Reinforce political credibility and accountability 5) Promote democratic practices through public participation and consultation". (http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=2179&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

Readers can not only post statements but can also reply to other posts. Posters must "sign" their posts with their name, occupation, and place of residence.

While ideally, the Action Forum seems to have been created as a community dialogue structuring SMO action and policy, it appears that its actual usage falls short of that. For a large SMO such as Moveon (their website reports over 3.3 million members), the top-rated post from nearly a week-and-a-half ago had garnered only about seven hundred votes. Moreover, the total post history contained almost 26,000 posts, viewable (by either importance rating or date) in groups of five. This appears to be a rather inefficient means to generate either consensus or a pragmatic action plan. Instead, it appears more as a large number of voices simply "preaching to the choir" in a discussion board format.

The proposed technology simplifies the voting process and also makes it more inclusive. Instead of having to read a (potentially long) post before participating, the proposed technology's internet voting mimics voting at the polls (i.e. allowing voters to vote on the same candidates and legislation); therefore, there is little or no new information that needs to be ingested by the voter. Because all users of the technology are required to

participate, results should be more indicative of the views of the global population than Moveon's elective representation strategy. Persons who ordinarily would not take the time, energy, and money (whether in direct costs or opportunity costs) to go the polls can be represented online. Despite the lack of a 100% penetration rate of the internet into U.S. (not to mention international) homes, this may have great implications for the legitimacy and (lack of) inclusiveness of traditional voting results.

Moveon's technology is also complicated by the grading scale of "importance". To rate a statement normatively (i.e. giving it between one and five stars) may not be a straightforward or commonsense decision for the voter.

While Moveon writes that the discussion forum is a tool that shapes the agenda of their SMO, the leaders of that SMO still exist as a closed set. They have the ability to pick and choose to either validate or contradict their current or projected future agenda. How can members be informed of how Moveon is using their comments to direct actions and policy? The proposed technology, on the other hand, exists as an open set where each vote counts equally, everyone can view the vote totals simply and easily, and all SMOs exist in a competitive environment in their appeal for the attentions of potential participants. Users can

see directly if politicians are using online voting results to either validate, challenge, or ignore the existing status quo. Politicians that ignore online representation may find themselves quickly out of favor with their voting constituencies.

Users of the proposed technology do not need to identify themselves with their views (as one must to participate in the Action Forum). Votes via the proposed technology are both secure and anonymous. For Moveon's Action Forum, all posters must type their name, occupation, and place of residence. This does little to cure the problem of relative anonymity on the internet, and while these identifiers could be easily falsified (thereby thwarting the personal identity security problems inherent in the tool), it is certainly a different approach to generating both ideas and consensus.

Vs. Discussion Board/Bulletin Board/News Group/Usenet

Discussion boards, bulletin boards, news groups, or usenets (I will refer to them henceforth as "discussion boards" or "boards") all allow posters to post messages to a globally viewable discussion thread. Typically, these discussion boards are unmoderated and (unlike listservs)

allow anyone to post without going through a registration/admission process. The discussion boards are similar to blogs in that anyone can view chronologically-listed content, but different in that they allow more people to post. The ability of discussion boards to display their messages by subject thread helps to clear the information clutter when compared to a listserv technology. Although listserv messages also have the ability to display subject headings (and therefore break down conversations by thread), the subscriber still receives (and then deletes) each of those messages. This is much slower than simply scrolling down a discussion board history until the viewer comes to a subject heading he/she wishes to read.

Discussion boards share the same disadvantage (relative to the proposed technology) as the Action Forum and weblogs in that it is the responsibility of the viewer to remind him/herself every day/week/month to visit the board to stay abreast of the postings. This is much different from listservs and the proposed technology insofar as these technologies "come to the user" instead of the user being responsible for visiting the discussion board/Action Forum/weblog. Some discussion boards aggregate the day's postings into a digest that is then sent via email to discussion board members, but this

practice is not widespread. Lack of ability for the discussion board to "come to the user" means that the viewer may stop visiting or stop remembering to visit the discussion board over time. This may especially be the case if the significance of the conversations tapers off after being intensive for a period of time.

Discussion boards are built with the assumption that viewers and posters want to engage in an open-form online conversation. While this ideal board prescribes a legitimate online community, its actual use can be quite different. Discussion board users generally fall into two communities, "posters" and "lurkers". Lurkers can benefit from the conversations and information on the boards without actually investing time or energy, without the threat of disclosing their identity (i.e. privacy issues), and without threat of being identified as a non-participator. This creates a free-rider problem for the discussion board. If no one wants to take the time and energy to share knowledge, the discussion board becomes marginal. Discussion boards that are successful depend upon a group of individuals who are willing to carry on a conversation before an unknown audience. Although a poster can hide his/her identity via a pseudonym, posting one's ideas before a large readership and then potentially

receiving (unfriendly) comments/criticisms may influence who is willing to participate in this type of dialogue. Therefore, the community that appears to exist on the discussion board is actually only a small (and possibly specialized) subset of all possible participants. This is much different from the proposed technology, where any subgroup of the user's social network is assumed to have some kind of (potentially off-line) familiarity with one another. Also, email messages that are being distributed among the social network identify all recipients, such that there are no "lurking" and unknown readers.

In general, both discussion boards and the proposed technology benefit from their capacity for privacy. Typically, no personal identifiers need to be divulged in order to post to a discussion group. Nor are the identities of the users of the proposed technology disclosed to the SMOs that are trying to recruit them. Thus, both technologies are less invasive than some of the other technologies that have been described thus far.

Discussion boards and the proposed technology differ in their ability to access and organize resources of social change. Because discussion boards are information-oriented and do not include real identities, they are not typically used for mobilizing direct protest in a given locale.

Oftentimes, discussion boards are not connected to real bricks and mortar SMOs that engage in physical demonstration. Instead, they are most often used for what they are named after - open discussion among sympathetic participants/readers. As stated earlier, the proposed technology allows SMOs to appeal to users directly for particular actions. Because social protest via the proposed technology is elective, users have the capacity to take concrete steps to advocate their position. Within a discussion group format, information related to social protest may be traded, but an actual and tangible facilitation towards a process of social protest is typically not within the sphere of that technology. In the case where the discussion board is integrated into the SMO's website, the discussion board may act as a forum to talk about proposed actions, but actual calls for mobilization are not disseminated solely through the discussion board format.

Discussion boards, like weblogs, benefit from their ability to record the history of the group. Unlike email messages that are continuously deleted, discussion group postings (or blog postings) can typically be accessed years after they were originally written. In addition, the nature of the postings, similar to blogs, allows for the

personalities of the posters to come through. This is much different from a 3rd-person organizational appeal from an established SMO.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the proposed technology possesses many of the advantages of many of the technologies described, while avoiding most of the disadvantages (see Table 1 for a summary). Because the proposed technology is still in the design phase, some outstanding questions still exist: will users be willing to interact with SMOs in the way prescribed by the proposed technology? Will users utilize a technology that documents their social network graphically?

Regardless of questions of usage, the conceptual differences between existing technologies and the proposed technology are such that further investigation into and development of the product is warranted.

TABLE 1

Technology	Intended Use of Technology											
	Provides information to the user		Can be used as a direct tool for networking		User creates a social product		Assumes potential user collaboration with SMO		Allows for user's direct representation of views		Technology may include invasive appeals	
Proposed technology	X		X		X		X		X			
Website	X											
Weblog	X											
Listserv	X		X		X		X		X		X	
Meetup	X		X		X		X		X			
Online donations/positive consumerism					X		X				X	
Electronic demonstration of grievances (e.g. online petitions, sit-ins)					X		X		X		X	
Action Forum	X				X				X			
Discussion board	X		X		X				X			

TABLE 1 (continued)

Intended Use of Technology

Technology	Intended Use of Technology									
	Allows for word-of-mouth re-distribution of SMO appeals	The technology sends (periodic) communication to the user	The user is not anonymous to other users	Participation limited by physicality	Potential to be aesthetically appealing	Allows for total privacy of personal information				
Proposed technology	X	X	X		X	X				
Website					X	X				
Weblog						X				
19 Listserv	X	X	X							
Meetup	X		X	X						
Online donations/positive consumerism										
Electronic demonstration of grievances (e.g. online petitions, sit-ins)	X									
Action Forum										
Discussion board	X					X				

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